MULTI-MERCHANT GIFT REGISTRY

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application is a continuation-in-part (CIP) application of U.S. patent application 10/212,323, filed August 5, 2002, which is a CIP application of U.S. patent application 10/008,647, filed November 9, 2001, which are all hereby incorporated by reference in their entireties.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to a gift registry system. In particular, the present invention relates to a multi-merchant gift registry system.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Bridal registries are commonly known. Traditionally, in the United States, when a couple decides to marry, they will often go to particular stores and choose certain items which they would like to receive as gifts at their wedding. The particular store registers the name of the couple and the gifts that they have selected. The register is often nothing more than a log book. In recent times the registry has become a computer database that is available for interaction by a touch screen.

The current practice is to have a bridal registry or baby registry in a single store. Multiple stores in a shopping mall may each have their own registries. This requires the registrants to go through the registration process at each store where they wish to register. Additionally, potential purchasers must follow the current practice of entering certain information regarding the registrant via the interactive touch screen at each store where the registrant is registered. This then requires the potential purchasers to have to wait in line to operate the registry and get printouts at each of the multiple stores.

Currently, it is only the larger stores that can afford to have the equipment to operate an automated self service gift registry system. Consequently, many smaller stores and vendors at which the bride and the groom or the parents of the child may wish to be registered are not able to have their own registry system. Additionally, potential purchasers may not like the store typically used for registries, or the potential purchasers may have coupons at other stores or have employee discounts at other stores. Finally, because other stores may have the same items that

the registrants have registered for at a lower price than the store in which the registry is located, the registry at the first store often does not accurately reflect the gifts which have been purchased elsewhere.

While this kind of self-service gift registry system has met with tremendous acceptance in the marketplace, there is a continued need for a multi-merchant registry that allows registrants to register for goods from a multitude of merchants.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention, in one embodiment, provides a system for registering items selected by a registrant from a plurality of participating merchants for subsequent communication to a prospective purchaser. The system has a computer system that contains identifying information about the registrant. A portable input and storage device is provided that can be carried by the registrant into a plurality of participating stores. The portable input and storage device is capable of acquiring and transmitting information regarding gifts that the registrant desires to receive as presents.

The present invention, in another embodiment, is a method of conveying gift registration information to a gift buyer. The method comprises indicating a gift item for purchase, indicating an entity where the gift item may be purchased, and providing a machine readable code associated with a registrant.

The present invention, in another embodiment, is an apparatus for conveying information to a gift buyer regarding a gift item recorded in a gift registration system as being intended for a registrant. The apparatus comprises a first location, a second location, and a machine-readable code associated with a registrant. The first location is adapted to convey information regarding the gift item. The second location is adapted to convey where the gift buyer may obtain the gift item.

The present invention, in another embodiment, is a method of recording a gift item into a gift registration system. The method comprises providing a machine readable form, recording on the machine readable form information regarding the gift item, recording on the machine readable form information regarding a registrant, and associating the machine readable form with a location where the gift item may be obtained.

The present invention, in another embodiment, is an apparatus for recording a gift item into a gift registration system, wherein the gift item is available at a merchant location and intended for a registrant. The apparatus comprises a first location, a second location, and a machine-readable code associated with the merchant location. The first location is adapted to receive, in a machine-readable format, information regarding the gift item. The second location is adapted to receive, in a machine-readable format, information regarding the registrant.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a block diagram representative of registry apparatus in accordance with the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a block diagram representative of an alternate embodiment of registry apparatus in accordance with the present invention;

FIG. 3 is a block diagram representative of a second alternate embodiment of registry apparatus in accordance with the present invention;

FIG. 4 is a block diagram representative of a registry network system in accordance with the present invention;

FIG. 5 is a flow chart representation of the steps taken by a registrant user of the registry apparatus in accordance with the present invention;

FIG. 6 is a flow chart representation similar to FIG. 5 of an alternate embodiment of the steps which may be taken by a registrant user;

FIG. 7 is a flow chart representation of the steps taken by a purchaser user of the registry apparatus in accordance with the present invention;

FIG. 8 is a flow chart representation of an alternate embodiment of the steps which may be taken by a purchaser user;

FIG. 9 is an illustration of a representative printout for a purchaser user;

FIGS. 10A-G are a series of illustrations representing screen images that are displayed to a registrant user or a purchaser user;

FIG. 11 is a perspective view of a kiosk housing usable in accordance with the present invention; and

FIGS. 12A-B are a flow chart representation of steps taken by a registrant to obtain a portable bar code scanner from a housing like that shown in FIG. 11 and return it.

FIG. 13 is a top plan view of a shopping mall having a gift registry apparatus according to the present invention.

FIG. 14 is a perspective view of a kiosk housing a multi-store gift registry and an ATM consistent with the principal of the present invention.

FIG. 15 is block diagram illustrating a portable scanning device consistent with the principal of the present invention.

FIG. 16 is a block diagram illustrating a portable scanning device consistent with the principal of the present invention.

FIG. 17 is a flow chart illustrating a process for registering for gifts consistent with the principal of the present invention.

FIG. 18 is a flow chart illustrating a process for a guest to use a gift registry consistent with the principal of the present invention.

FIG. 19 is a block diagram of a universal gift registry system consistent with the principal of the present invention.

FIG. 20 is a flow chart illustrating a process for cross sale marketing between a multi-store gift registry and a financial institution, consistent with the principal of the present invention.

FIG. 21 is a schematic diagram illustrating a multi-store gift registry utilizing a wireless scanning device consistent with the principles of the present invention.

FIG. 22 is a schematic diagram illustrating a multi-store gift registry utilizing a wireless scanning device consistent with the principles of the present invention.

FIG. 23 is a schematic diagram illustrating a wireless hand-held scanning device with a removable memory module.

FIG. 24 is a schematic diagram illustrating a retail location using the multi-store gift registry.

FIG. 25 is a flow chart illustrating a process of using a wireless scanning device within a multi-store gift registry.

FIG. 26 is a flow chart illustrating a process of using a wireless scanning device having a removable memory module within a multi-store gift registry.

FIGS. 27-29 are flow diagrams that illustrate various communication sequences consistent with the principles of the present invention.

FIG. 30A is an illustration of a representative form for recording gift registration information.

FIG. 30B is an illustration of a representative form for recording gift registration information.

FIG. 31 is a front side of a gift card.

FIG. 32 is a back side of the gift card illustrated in FIG. 31.

FIG. 33 is an illustration of a representative gift card/certificate selection form.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

A gift registry apparatus will be described below. The apparatus will be described with specific reference to a wedding gift registry but it should be understood that it is equally applicable to a baby gift registry or birthday gift registry. Additionally, like elements in the figures are correspondingly identified with primed numerals.

The present invention is designed such that a registrant, or first user, may register for gifts from multiple merchants as opposed to the current practice of only registering in a single store. The present invention will be described with reference to an enclosed shopping mall, but it should be noted that the gift registry apparatus could be located in a kiosk adjacent a strip mall, in the side of a wall of one of the buildings of the strip mall, or in a kiosk in its own small protective shelter similar to some automatic teller machines, adjacent a downtown shopping area or other like area.

The present invention is illustrated schematically in FIG. 13. FIG. 13 is a top plan view of a shopping mall having a gift registry kiosk situated centrally in the mall. The gift registry system has a computer system that contains identifying information about the registrant. A portable input and storage device is provided that can be carried by the registrant into a plurality of participating stores. In the preferred embodiment of the present invention the portable input and storage device is a hand held scanning device. The portable input and storage device is capable of receiving and storing information regarding gifts that the registrant desires to receive as presents, as well as information necessary to identify the particular merchant which carries a desired gift.

The input and storage device stores a unique identifier for the particular merchant for each desired gift, as well as a unique identifier for the gift itself. The unique identifiers are preferably in the form of a bar code that is scanned in by the registrant for each merchant and each gift. A transfer device is provided connected to the computer system for receiving and transferring the information from the portable input and storage device regarding the registrant's desired gifts and the particular merchant those gifts are from. Finally, a prospective purchaser interface device is provided that allows the prospective purchaser to view a list of the gifts desired by the registrant and which particular merchant those gifts are from.

A gift registry apparatus is designated generally by the numeral 20 in FIG. 1. Apparatus 20 is illustrated to include computer mechanism 22 and bar code scanning mechanism 24 for obtaining Universal Product Code (UPC) information about possible gift items. The UPC information allows the computer mechanism to categorize products or, in this case, potential gift items, so that a gift buyer can have the option of obtaining a list of gifts of a particular category.

The scanning mechanism 24 includes not only the bar code reading feature, but also a mechanism for transferring the information to computer mechanism 22. Bar code scanning mechanism 24 includes a bar code scanner 40 and may include a holder 44 with a locking mechanism 46 which unlocks only when a card reader 36 has appropriately read a magnetically encoded card, such as a credit card. Holder 44 may include a transfer device 45 which reads the memory of bar code scanning mechanism 24 for communication to a computer 26. The various electrical connections and locking/unlocking mechanism for use with the bar code scanning mechanism are conventional.

It is noted that scanning mechanism 24 is a key feature of an arrangement which may also include a card reader 36 which functions as a key to unlock scanning mechanism 24 as discussed in more detail hereinafter. Such arrangement allows the registrant (also called the first user) to browse among possible gift items to identify a group of the items which are desired as gifts. After registration is completed by a registrant, although a potential gift purchaser may not personally use the scanning mechanism 24 as a part of the arrangement which allows the potential gift purchaser to browse among the group of items selected by the registrant to identify a particular one of the group for purchase, it is likely that a store clerk will scan bar codes or otherwise obtain necessary information for transfer to computer mechanism 22 regarding items purchased.

Computer mechanism 22 includes a printer 34 and computer 26, as well as an interface mechanism 28 which comprises a monitor 30 and a touch screen 32. Computer mechanism 22 also includes software (not shown). Computer 26 preferably has a modem 37 for communication with a central processing mechanism as described more fully with respect to FIG. 4. Alternatively, modem 37 could connect to a network or to a mainframe. A keyboard port 38 is available on computer 26 to provide various servicing functions.

The software includes a first mechanism for receiving the first information about the registrant user and a second mechanism for receiving the second information about possible gift items. The software also includes a mechanism for associating the first and second information. In addition, the software includes a mechanism for obtaining the first and second information which has been associated together.

Computer mechanism 22 and bar code scanning mechanism 24 in conjunction with the software preferably further include a mechanism for verifying by the registrant that the items on which information has been entered are those desired by the registrant as a result of being able to review at least some of the information obtained from scanning the bar codes. The verifying mechanism includes a display mechanism 212 (see FIG. 11) which is a part of or mounted on the bar code scanner 40.

A kiosk representative of a housing 200 appropriate for containing the various mechanisms is depicted in FIG. 11. The computer terminal mechanism is not visible, but is contained within the housing. Monitor 30 with touch screen 32 is located approximately 31/2 feet above the ground at an incline approximately perpendicular to the line of sight of a 5'8" person's eyes. An access opening 202 for card reader 36 (not shown) is provided. Bar code scanner 40 is held on a transfer device 45 in a compartment 204 having a sliding door 206. Preferably a sensor (not shown) would sense when bar code scanner 40 is physically present on the transfer device 45. Preferably, there would also be sensors (not shown) which would sense when door 206 is open and when door 206 is closed. The sensors would provide triggering signals with respect to screens appearing on the monitor to instruct the user. Appropriate sensors and sensing circuits are known by those skilled in the art.

Kiosk 200 is also useful for dispensing gift certificates. When functioning to dispense a gift certificate, the certificate is dispensed at opening 208. Likewise, printouts requested as part of the gift registry are also dispensed from opening 208. Thus, with the two functions possible

using the same housing 200, it is possible to provide a reward in the form of a gift certificate to the gift registry registrant as an acknowledgement for using the apparatus. The gift certificate function is more fully explained in U.S. Pat. No. 5,243,174, herein incorporated by reference. Bar code scanner 40 is portable and preferably, although not required, includes a keyboard 210 and an LCD screen 212. The keyboard can be used to enter the identification number or an equivalent UPC number of a bar code which does not scan. The keyboard can also be used to enter purchase information after a purchaser makes a purchase. As indicated, the LCD screen is available for immediate verification that the correct bar code was scanned with respect to the item desired. An acceptable portable bar code scanner for this apparatus is Symbol Model LDT 3805. The particularly novel characteristic of apparatus 200 is that it allows the gift registry system to be a complete self-service system up to the point of purchase of a gift by the second user or gift buyer.

With respect to the gift registrant taking the portable bar code scanner to browse the store, a preferred form of security is that the registrant would provide a credit card to opening 202 to be read. Credit on the credit card account would be checked and a predetermined sum, for example $200, would be debited to the account before releasing the scanner. When the account was verified, credit found to be available, and the debit made, door 206 would either automatically open or, at least, would unlock and a prompt would appear on the monitor for the registrant to open the door and take the scanner. When door 206 was sensed to be open, another prompt could appear on the monitor for the registrant to take the bar code scanner 40. When it was sensed that the bar code scanner was no longer present, door 206 would automatically close and lock or the registrant would be prompted to close the door. After the registrant had completed use of the scanner 40, either an appropriate indication would be made on a menu at monitor 30 or the credit card could once again be inserted and read, whereupon appropriate menus would instruct the registrant to open door 206 and place scanner 40 properly on the charging stand and transfer device 45. The physical presence of scanner 40 would be sensed. An appropriate communication would be made between the terminal computer or the central processing computer and the scanner to verify that it was placed properly. Door 206 would then automatically close or a prompt would be given for the registrant to close the door. When the door was sensed to be closed, the credit card account would be credited an equal amount as the earlier debit, and the registrant would be informed of such action and thanked for registering

gifts in the registry.

Alternatively, the portable bar code scanner is in the possession of the retail store. In this case, when a registrant wishes to register gifts in the registry apparatus, a store clerk requires, for example, cash, a credit card, driver's license, or something equivalent as security for giving the bar code scanner to the registrant user.

After the user has initiated apparatus 20 by entering first information on themselves in the computer, they walk around the store with the bar code scanner. Second information obtained from the bar codes scanned on the desired items, is communicated to the computer. In this regard, as shown in FIG. 2, bar code scanner 40' with memory/storage preferably includes a transmitter 52 which through radio, infrared, or other electromagnetic frequencies sends encoded information to receiver 54 for downloading to computer 26'. Other elements of apparatus 20' are similar to those of apparatus 20, for example, printer 34', monitor 30' and touch screen 32'. Alternatively, the communication mechanism could be removable storage media 42, for example, a commonly known floppy disk, which could be removed from the scanner and inserted in retrieving mechanism 48 in the computer, such as the usual floppy disk receiving slot and related mechanism.

A further alternative is shown in FIG. 3. Bar code scanner 40" includes a modem 56 or is connected to a modem as part of a transfer device (like 45). Modem 56, in a conventional fashion, connects through a public telephone channel to modem 37" of computer 26". Apparatus 20" is also likely to include some or all of the other elements of apparatus 20, such as printer 34", monitor 30", and touch screen 32".

Apparatus 20" is an interesting embodiment in that conceivably bar code scanner 40" could be located in the first user's home. Appropriate first information on the user could be entered into computer 26" in various ways, such as through a home personal computer with a modem connection to the store computer, by orally giving the first information over the telephone to a person entering it into the store computer 26", or by the first user entering the first information into computer 26" when the first user registrant is visiting the store. In any case, the store could send a catalog to perspective users. The catalog, as well as showing various items available, could include bar codes for those items. In that way, the bar code scanner could be used to scan bar codes of interest in order to enter appropriate second information as indicated via apparatus 20". The second information would be sent to computer 26" via the connection

which can be made between the modems. Likewise, a shopper second user could select a gift from the catalog and communicate appropriate information, including the second information obtained from scanning the bar code, via the connection between the modems. In the usual way that business is conducted with respect to catalog sales, the gift item would be sent to the shopper second user.

In the preferred of these various embodiments, with reference to FIG. 1, computer 26 is an IBM PC or compatible computer with at least 2 megabytes of dynamic memory. Monitor 12 is a standard Super VGA Monitor capable of displaying 640.times.480 pixels at 256 colors per pixel. Touch screen 14 is an Elographics Intellitouch model 4001 Surface Acoustic Wave Touch Screen with Touch Screen Controller. Card reader 16 is a Magtek Swipe M%211232 magnetic card reader connected to computer 26 through an RS232 line. Laser printer 36 is a Canon LBP4 laser printer. Modem 42 is a 9600 Baud Multitec 10 Model MT 1432 error correcting modem. Bar code scanner 40 is a Symbol model 3805.

Holder 44 functioning as a transfer device is a Symbol CBM 38bb Cradle Base Module. In the embodiment of FIG. 2, transmitter 52 is a Symbol model LRT3805, while receiver 54 is a Symbol Spectrum 1 radio frequency network. All these items are commercially available as is known to those skilled in the art.

Gift registry apparatus 20 operates independently as shown in FIGS. 1-3, or within a network as shown in FIG. 4. Network 58 provides for numerous apparatuses 20 depicted in the form of branch computers 60 with bar code scanners 62. Apparatuses 20.1 through 20.N are connected as known to those skilled in the art through public telecommunications channel 64 to a central processing computer 66. Alternatively, they could be connected to central processing computer through a Local Area Network (LAN) or Wide Area Network (WAN). Central processing computer 66 is connected to a printer 68 for printing various transactions, as desired. In a preferred embodiment, central processing computer 66 could be a PC compatible computer and printer 68 is a laser printer of the type indicated hereinbefore. With a network 58, the registrant first user can input first and second information in any of the fashions indicated with respect to any of the terminal computer mechanisms 20.1 to 20.N. The association of the first and second information can take place in a particular computer mechanism 20.N or it can take place in the central processing computer 66. Regardless of where the association occurs, the associated information is stored in the memory or available storage of central processing

computer 66. In that way, any one of computing mechanisms 20.N can be accessed by a second user in order to obtain the associated first and second information as desired.

It is noted that network 58 can also access a credit card authorization computer 70 in a known fashion through public telephone channels 64. This may be desirable to validate particular registrants, and as indicated, is useful in debiting an account as security for the bar code scanner with a subsequent credit when the scanner is returned.

Flow charts depicting a registrant user's use of the gift registry apparatus are shown in FIGS. 5 and 6. With reference to FIG. 5, the registrant approaches the gift registry apparatus and as indicated at box 72, the registrants enter first information about themselves. The gift registry apparatus as indicated at box 74 receives the first information and provides either on the monitor or by printout a unique identification number and a password for the particular registrant. Alternatively, the registrant could be given an option of providing a password. The identification number enables association of first and second information. The password is needed so that the information contained in the registry apparatus which is relevant to the particular registrant can only be modified by someone who knows the password. Accumulated information can be accessed by any potential gift giver who simply knows the name of the registrant.

As indicated at box 76, the registrant obtains the identification number and password and requests the bar code scanner. In the presently discussed embodiment, the store retains control of the bar code scanner, so that as indicated at box 78, it is the store which provides the bar code scanner to the registrant upon request. As indicated at box 80, the registrant then scans the identification number in the form of a unique bar code and walks about the store scanning bar codes of desired gift items to obtain second information. Alternatively, the identification number could be provided to the bar code scanner by the computer through the transfer device or could be manually entered at the scanner keyboard. When the registrant has completed scanning the bar codes of all the items which they may wish to receive as gifts, as indicated at box 82, the registrant returns the scanner to a store clerk. The store clerk, as indicated at box 84, places the scanner in the transfer device so that the second information can be downloaded to the computer. As indicated at box 86, the gift registry apparatus receives the second information and, as indicated at box 88, it associates the first and second information together. As indicated at box 89, the gift registry apparatus can be on-line to databases which include UPC data and current prices.

The flow charts of FIGS. 12A and 12B depict an alternative to the store providing the bar code scanner to the registrant (see also FIG. 11). Just as indicated at box 72 in FIG. 5, the first step, as indicated at box 214 is for the registrant to enter first information about themselves. As indicated at box 216, the first information is received by apparatus 20 and a prompt given for the registrant to supply a credit card or other appropriate unlocking mechanism. At box 218, the registrant passes the magnetic card through the card reader. At box 220, the account represented in the information read from the card is validated and, assuming that there is credit available, a hold is placed against a predetermined amount of credit as security for the bar code reader. In the preferred embodiment, as indicated at box 222, the unique identification number is transmitted to the bar code scanner. Then, at box 224, the door 206 is unlocked and registrant is prompted to open it. As indicated at box 226, the registrant opens the door. At box 228, apparatus 20 senses that the door is open and prompts registrant to take the scanner. As indicated at box 230, registrant takes the scanner, closes the door according to instructions, and acknowledges that the scanner has been taken. At box 232, the door is locked. At box 234, it is indicated that the registrant is then free to browse among possible gift items and scan bar codes for second information. The flow chart of FIG. 12A, as described, corresponds with the flow chart of FIG. 5 inclusive of boxes 72-80.

The flow chart depicted in FIG. 12B relates to the registrant returning the bar code scanner and having a credit placed against the debit which was earlier posted to the credit card account. As indicated at box 236, registrant first identifies or registers a desire to return the scanner. At box 238, the door 206 of compartment 204 is unlocked and the registrant is prompted to open the door and return scanner. Depending on the construction of housing 200, door 206 may automatically open and close as appropriate or there may be prompts for the registrant to physically open and close the door. At box 240, registrant replaces the scanner. At box 242, replacement of the scanner is sensed and apparatus 20 makes a communication with the scanner to insure that it has been properly placed for recharging and downloading of second information. The door is either automatically closed or a prompt is given to the registrant to close the door. At box 244, the hold that was placed against the credit card account is removed. At box 246, the registrant is thanked and monitor 30 reverts to the welcome screen. At box 248, apparatus 20 downloads the second information from the scanner to the appropriate computer for association with other accumulated information regarding that registrant. The flow chart of FIG. 12B

corresponds with the inclusive boxes of 82-86 in FIG. 5. The subsequent portion of FIG. 5 is still appropriate. In that regard, rather than the monitor reverting to the welcome screen, it may allow the registrant to review the accumulated information for any changes. Based on the indicated method of FIGS. 12A and 12B, the computer terminal is programmed appropriately and present screens such as those shown in FIGS. 10F and 10G.

The procedure discussed thus far is sufficient for a useful gift registry system. With references to FIGS. 7 and 8, a gift buyer could now approach the system and obtain desired information as indicated in the flow charts of FIGS. 7 and 8. Nevertheless, there are further advantageous steps available. It is desirable, as indicated at box 90 of FIG. 5, that the registrant reviews the associated first and second information for correctness. If there is incorrect information or if the registrant wishes to delete certain information or enter new information, the apparatus may be again accessed by using the identification number and password and making appropriate changes. After the review and any changes have been made, the gift registry apparatus receives an indication from the registrant that the review has been made and completed. As indicated at box 92, it is then possible to optionally reward the registrant for taking the time and trouble to provide all this information to the gift registry apparatus of a particular store. The apparatus can be made capable to provide the reward to the registrant in the form of a store gift certificate, which may be pre-printed, or credit for a more general gift certificate selection as disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 5,243,174. As indicated at box 94, the registrant receives the gift certificate and can thereafter redeem it in a usual fashion.

The flow chart of FIG. 6 has many similarities to that of FIG. 5, but there are also significant differences. As indicated at box 72', the registrant registers first information about themselves. As indicated at box 74', the gift registry apparatus receives the first information and provides the unique identification number. As indicated at box 76', the unique identification number is obtained. Then, as indicated at box 96, the registrant obtains the bar code scanner as otherwise indicated herein. The registrant, as indicated at box 80', then scans the unique identification number in bar code form and walks the store scanning bar codes of desired gift items to obtain second information. The registrant finally, as indicated at box 98, returns the bar code scanner to the holder so that, as indicated by broken line 100 leading to box 102, the second information can be transferred from the transfer mechanism of the holder to the gift registry apparatus. Alternatively, as indicated by solid line 101, the second information can be

transmitted by radio frequency to the gift registry system and the bar code scanner then returned to its holder. As indicated at box 88', the apparatus associates the first and second information. As with the earlier described procedure, the present procedure could be ended with box 88'. As indicated in FIG. 6, however, there are further advantageous alternatives. The gift registry apparatus network can be in on-line communication to databases which include current Universal Product Code (UPC) data, as well as current prices. Such information when associated with the first and second information of the registry then allows the registry apparatus to categorize desired gift items by price or price range so that potential gift buyers can obtain price information or can obtain desired gifts of a certain price range. Additionally, the price information can be continually updated and, consequently, kept current with the information that is in the databases. The on-line communication is indicated at box 104. Additionally, as previously indicated immediate communication in conjunction with a bar code scanner having an LCD display 212 (see FIG. 11) can provide information on the display immediately after the bar code of a particular item has been scanned so that the user can verify from the information displayed whether the correct bar code was scanned and entered.

As with the procedure of FIG. 5, as indicated at box 90', it is also desirable to have the registrant review the associated first and second information, and perhaps price information. As indicated at box 92', the gift registry apparatus receives the review indication and prints or otherwise dispenses a gift certificate. As indicated at box 94', the registrant receives the gift certificate. In a somewhat different procedure than indicated with respect to FIG. 5, as indicated at box 106, the registrant could after receiving the gift certificate provide any changes to the first and second information so that as indicated at box 108, the gift registry apparatus would at that time receive the changes.

In one embodiment of the invention, the registrant utilizes a form to record desired gift items with the registration system. In one embodiment, information regarding the registrant, the participating store, and the desired gift items is entered on the form by hand, delivered to the participating merchant or registration system, and then entered by hand into the registration system.

In another embodiment, the registrant utilizes a machine-readable tri-fold form to record desired gift items with the registration system. FIGS. 30A and 30B depict similar embodiments of the machine-readable form that the registrant can use to record desired gift items with the

registration system. In one embodiment, information is hand printed or typed in the various form sections. A character recognition system then reads the printed/typed information and provides it to the registration system. In another embodiment, the machine-readable sheet has one or more sections in a Scantron ® type format with bubbles that are filled in and then read by a machine.

As shown in FIGS. 30A and 30B, the machine-readable forms include a store name section 356, a bar code section 358, a registrant information section 360, and one or more gift item sections 362. In one embodiment, the store name section 356 may include the store name 356, the store's address, and its phone number. In one embodiment, as indicated in FIG. 30A, the store name 356 may be provided in its logo form. In one embodiment, as shown in FIG. 30B, the store name section 356 is adapted to receive a store's name and/or contact information via text written or typed into the section 356 or via a sticker affixed to the section 356. In one embodiment, the sticker is a label having the store's name and/or contact information. In one embodiment, the store's name is displayed in logo form on the label. In one embodiment, the label has a bar code or other machine readable code associated with the store.

The registrant information section 360 includes a registrant identification number section 364, a registrant name section 366, and a merchant identification code section 368. In one embodiment, information is printed or typed in these sections 364, 366, 368 and a character recognition system reads the text and provides it to the registration system. In another embodiment, these sections 364, 366, 368 exist in a Scantron ® type format. The registrant's name is placed in the registrant name section 366 and the registrant's identification number is placed in the registrant identification number section 364.

As shown in FIG. 30A, the participating store's identification code is placed in the merchant identification code section 368. As shown in FIG. 30B and previously explained, the store's identification code may be located in the store name section 356 via a label displaying the merchant identification code in human or machine readable format and affixed to the section 356. Also, as shown in FIG. 30B, the store identification code may be displayed via the bar code section 358. Thus, information necessary to identify the registrant and participating store to the registration system is available via a completed registrant information section 360, store name section 356, and bar code section 358.

In one embodiment, the bar code 358 represents, in machine-readable form, an identification code associated with the store name 356 listed on the form. In one embodiment,

the identification code represented by the bar code 358 is the same code provided in the merchant code section 368. When a machine reads the form, the machine receives the store's identification code and associates the information provided in the various sections of the form with the proper store.

In one embodiment, the gift item sections 362 include a name/description section 370, an identification code section 372, a price section 374, a quantity needed/desired section 376, and a vendor/style section 378. In one embodiment, information is printed or typed in these sections 370, 372, 374, 376, 378 and a character recognition system reads the text and provides it to the registration system. In another embodiment, these sections 370, 372, 374, 376, 378 exist in a Scantron ® type format. The gift item's name/description is placed in the name/description section 370, the gift item's identification code is placed in the identification code section 372, the gift item's price is placed in the price section 374, and the gift item's manufacturer is listed in the vendor/style section 378. The quantity of each desired gift item is placed in the quantity needed/desired section 376. Thus, information necessary to identify the desired gift item, its price, and the desired quantities of the gift item is available to the registration system via a completed gift item section 362.

Providing one of the above-described forms, whether the information is provided to the registration system in a machine-readable format or entered into the registration system by hand, allows small retailers the ability to provide a gift registry to its customers. Also, the above-described forms allow stores to participate in the registration system despite being located outside the mall where the registration system kiosk is located. Thus, providing the above-described form is advantageous because it expands the number of stores from which a registrant may select gift items. The forms allow a single gift registry system to list desired gift items at any and all stores, whether or not the stores are located within the mall where the registration system kiosk is located, and even if the store is small and is without a computerized, price-scanning, checkout register system.

In one embodiment of the invention, a registrant enters the name of a participating store into the registration system. The registration system then prints a form as shown in FIG. 30A. The printed form has the name 356 of the participating store and a bar code 358 that provides the store's identification number in machine-readable form. The registrant then takes the printed form to the participating store to record the desired gift items. In another embodiment, the

registrant enters the participating store and requests a preprinted form having the store's name 356 and bar code 358 as illustrated in FIG. 30A. The store clerk, already having a supply of forms on hand, provides the registrant with the requested form.

In one embodiment, as shown in FIG. 30B, the forms are generic and provided at the kiosk or supplied to the store. The store's label is then affixed to the form utilized by the registrant in the store. As explained above, the label may contain the store's name, contact information, and identification code. The identification code may be in human or machine readable format (e.g., bar code).

Whether the form is printed from the registration system or obtained from the store clerk, the registrant's information is entered into the registrant information section 360 as previously described, and the registrant takes the form through the participating store and selects the desired gift items. When a desired gift item is selected, the item's name/description, identification code, quantity, manufacturer, and price are entered into the appropriate sections within the gift item section 362 as previously described. The clerk then retains the completed form for entry into the registration system, or the registrant returns the completed form to the registration system. In either case, the information on the form may be entered into the registration system manually or via one of the machine-readable processes previously described.

In one embodiment adapted for stores without a computerized, price-scanning, checkout register system, once the information on the form is entered into the registration system, the registration system assigns an identification number to each gift listed on the form. The registration system then provides the identification numbers to the store. When a gift purchaser buys one or more of the gifts listed on the form, the store provides the corresponding identification numbers to the registration system, which updates the registrant's overall gift list accordingly.

The procedure for using the gift registry apparatus, which is followed by potential gift buyers, is shown in FIGS. 7 and 8. With reference to FIG. 7, a gift buyer first approaches the gift registry apparatus, and as indicated at box 110, identifies the registrant. Identifying the registrant may be done using encoded registry cards, as disclosed in Applicant's co-pending application entitled "A Method and Apparatus for Providing Registry Cards", the disclosure of which has been incorporated herein by reference, or through a touch screen menu system as described above. There can be further verification steps, such as also identifying the wedding date or the

future spouse's name. As indicated at box 112, the gift registry apparatus provides access to the gift buyer so that the gift buyer can obtain associated first and second information. As indicated at box 114, the gift buyer is given various menu options from which to select information for printing. As indicated at box 116, when an appropriate option has been selected, the gift registry apparatus prints the selected information. As indicated at box 118, the potential gift buyer receives the printout, walks the store and selects desired gifts, and then checks the gifts purchased on the printout or has the store clerk identify the gifts purchased so that, as indicated at box 120, the store clerk can update information in the gift registry apparatus. The update may be done at a terminal located in the store accessible to the clerk or could be located at a remote site wherein someone receiving the appropriate gift purchase information could do the update. In any case, as indicated at box 122, the gift registry apparatus receives the updated information and associates it with the first and second information.

A representative printout, as referenced at box 118, is shown in FIG. 9. The printout includes a registrant identification section 266, a graphics section 268 (e.g., color or black and white graphics), a store/mall identification section 270, and a gift information section 272. The registrant identification section 266 identifies the registrant and includes an event date 274, an event name 276, the registrant's name 278, a bar code 280, and a registrant/event identification number 282, which is the same as the registrant identification number discussed hereinbefore. Thus, in the context of a marriage, the registrant identification section 266 may indicate the names of the people getting married and their wedding date or other information, such as location. In the context of a baby shower, the registrant identification section 266 may indicate the parents' name and/or the baby's name, gender, and date of birth. In the context of a birthday, graduation, or other celebration for an individual, the registrant identification section 266 may indicate the name of the person who is the focus of the celebration, their gender and the date of the celebration.

The bar code 280 represents the registrant identification number in machine-readable form. As will be explained more fully later in this specification, when a gift buyer purchases a gift item listed on the printout, the bar code 280 on the printout may be scanned to provide a store checkout system with the registrant identification number. The registrant identification number may then be forwarded with the gift item purchase information (i.e., the gift item

identification code and the number of each gift item purchased) to the gift registration system to update the printout.

The graphics section 268 includes individual images 284 of consumer products. In one embodiment, the individual images 284 are representative of the types of products that can be purchased at the stores participating in the gift registry system. In another embodiment, the individual images 284 are images of the gift items listed in the gift information section 272.

Showing individual images 284 of the gift items listed in the gift information section 272 provides two benefits. First, it creates excitement about shopping off of the list because the listed gift items become more than a name and number. Second, it provides the gift buyer with a better understanding of each listed gift item's nature, which allows the gift buyer to make decisions regarding each listed gift item without having to visit the store where the gift item is stocked. This saves time for the gift buyer.

The store/mall identification section 270 includes the name of the store/mall 286 and/or its address 288 and phone number 290. The store/mall identification section 270 tells a gift buyer where the gift list originated. In one embodiment, besides providing location and contact information for a mall where the gift registry kiosk is located, the printout can also provide location and contact information for participating stores located outside the mall.

The gift information section 272 includes a gift item/preference column 292, an item code column 294, a gift status column 296, and a price/notes column 298. The gift item/preference column 292 lists each gift item by name/description 340. In one embodiment, the gift item's image 284 appears adjacent to each name/description 340.

In one embodiment, the item code column 294 includes the identification code 342 for each gift item listed in the gift item/preference column 292. Where the gift item has an essentially unlimited availability, the identification code 342 may be a number assigned by the gift registry apparatus, a number assigned by the store selling the gift item, a number assigned by the manufacturer of the gift item, or a UPC number. In one embodiment, the identification code 342 is a bar code.

In some gift item situations, the identification code 342 may be text, such as the word "Preference," as illustrated at A in FIG. 9. This can occur where the where the gift item has a limited availability (e.g., the item is limited edition or custom made, as indicated by B and C in FIG. 9, respectively). This can also occur where the registrant wants the gift buyer to make a

selection based on the guiding parameters listed by the registrant (e.g., as indicated by D in FIG. 9, the registrant wants a certain brand and size of throw pillows, but is leaving the selection of the floral pattern to the gift buyer).

The word "Preference," or a similar word, phrase or symbol in the item code column 294, tells the gift buyer that the associated name/description 340 in the gift item/preference column 292 indicates a group or class of gift items with which the registrant might be pleased to receive as a gift. In one embodiment, where the word "Preference," or its equivalent appears in the item code column 294, the associated name/descriptions 340 in the gift item/preference column 292 may be listed in the alternative as indicated by E in FIG. 9. In one embodiment, the associated name/descriptions 340 may be listed as guiding parameters as indicated by D in FIG. 9. In one embodiment, the associated name/description 340 may be listed as a group of gift items from which the gift buyer may select. In one embodiment, the group of gift items are numbered and/or listed in the registrant's order of preference.

The listing of preferences is advantageous because it broadens the number of possible gift items with which the registrant will be pleased. This is especially useful in the context of limited availability items. For example, as indicated by E in FIG. 9, a hypothetical registrant has requested "[a]rt by Eng Tay or Yi Kai, etching or acrylic." A gift buyer enters "Art Resources Gallery," which is the store listed as selling the subject art, and asks to purchase an etching by Eng Tay. The salesperson informs the gift buyer that they are out of art by Eng Tay, but they do have acrylics by Yi Kai, which is listed as a preference (see E in FIG. 9). Because of the preference listing, the gift buyer can purchase the acrylic feeling confident that the registrant will be pleased. Alternatively, if the store is out of art by Eng Tay and Yi Kai, the salesperson may, based on the understanding gained from the preference listing, recommend the purchase of art by a third similar artist. The gift buyer could then purchase art by the third artist and feel comfortable that the registrant will be pleased. Thus, because of the flexibility provided by the preference aspect of the printout, the registrant receives a limited quantity type gift that might not have been received otherwise.

In another example, the registrant desires custom tailored slacks. In the gift item/preference column 292, the registrant might have the following information displayed: "custom tailored slacks; solid colors – blue, black and/or dark gray; 33 inch waist, 34 inch in-

seem." Thus, the gift buyer could go to the participating tailor and purchase slacks that have the color and size the registrant will find acceptable.

The item code column 294 also includes the store name 344 associated with each identification code 342. In other words, for each listed gift item, the item code column 294 identifies the appropriate gift item identification code 342 and the name 344 of the store where the gift item can be purchased. In one embodiment, each store name 344 is displayed in its logo format as indicated in FIG. 9.

The gift status column 296 includes a want column 346, a received column 348, and a number purchased column 350. The want column 346 indicates the number of each gift item desired by the registrant. The received column 348 indicates the number of each gift item purchased for the registrant as of the date of the printout. The number purchased column 350 indicates the number of each gift item purchased by the current gift buyer.

The price/notes column 298 includes prices 352 and/or notes 354 for each of the gift items listed in the printout. The notes may indicate an unlimited number of things regarding the gift item. For example, the notes may indicate that the item is seasonal, of limited availability (see B in FIG. 9), or a custom order (see C in FIG. 9). The notes may also indicate that the listed price is an estimate or that the listed price is the sale or discount price. Also, the notes may indicate the time period of the sale.

The information displayed in the gift information section 272 may be organized in several different ways. For example, as shown in FIG. 9, in one embodiment, the gift items may be grouped according to the store name 344 where they are available. In one embodiment, the store names 344 are then listed in alphabetical order. In another embodiment, the store names 344 are listed or grouped by geographical location within the mall. In another embodiment, the store names 344 are listed or grouped according to types of merchandise they carry. Where stores participating in the gift registry system are located outside the participating mall, the store names 344 for the non-mall stores may be listed or grouped according to such parameters as proximity to the mall, alphabetical order, or category of merchandise.

In another embodiment, the gift items are listed according to their alphabetical order. In another embodiment, the gift items are listed or grouped according to their category of merchandise or according to their price. In either case, in one embodiment, each gift item identification code 342 is listed individually with its associated store name 344. In one

embodiment of the registration system, the registrant and/or the gift buyer may determine the format in which the gift information section 272 is displayed on the printout.

In one embodiment, gift item purchase information is manually updated in the gift registration system. Specifically, in the number purchased column 350 of the printout, the store clerk records the number of units of a particular gift item purchased by the gift buyer. This creates a physical record of the gift items purchased. This physical record is saved until someone can update the information in the gift registry system to show that the particular gift item has been purchased.

In another embodiment, as illustrated in FIG. 8, gift item purchase information is automatically updated in the gift registration system. Specifically, as shown at box 110' of FIG. 8, the gift buyer identifies the registrant. The gift registry apparatus, as shown at box 112', provides access to the gift buyer in order that the gift buyer can obtain associated first and second information. As shown at box 114', the gift buyer selects appropriate information for printing. As shown at box 116', the selected information is printed. In one embodiment, the printout appears as indicated in FIG. 9.

As shown at box 124, the gift buyer receives the printout, selects desired gifts, and the gift buyer or a store clerk uses a bar code scanner to scan bar codes of items purchased to obtain third information. In this regard, in an advanced system, the store clerk could use the same bar code scanning mechanism that is used in checking items at the purchase counter for payment. For example, there may be a code to enter or a button to touch that would initiate a software routine allowing receipt of the third information simultaneous with other use of the information with respect to checkout. The third information would be transferred as appropriate to the central computer of apparatus 20.

In one embodiment, the retailer has a dedicated scanner that is interconnected to the gift registry system. The retailer scans the items purchased by the gift buyer and the gift registry system automatically updates the listing associated with the registrant for whom the gift purchase was made.

In one automated embodiment, the registrant identification number is provided to the central computer of the apparatus 20 by scanning the bar code 280 on the printout or by entering the registrant identification number by hand. Then the third information including the bar code or other identifying information of the gift item and the quantity of the particular gift item

purchased is entered. Depending on the programming, the third information is then appropriately communicated and, by using the received registrant identification number, is associated with other accumulate information. As indicated at box 130, the gift registry apparatus receives the third information and, as indicated at box 132, the third information is associated with the first and second information. This is advantageous because it allows real-time updating of the gift registry system and the printout.

Alternatively, the third information can be transmitted by radio frequency as discussed hereinbefore directly from the bar code scanner to the computer terminal and immediately associated with the first and second information. Such procedure is indicated by the solid arrow 134 extending from box 124 to box 130.

In one embodiment, a store's purchase tracking system may communicate to the registration system that a sale or discount is being offered on gift items that have yet to be purchased. For example, as shown in FIG. 9, no purchases have occurred for the "Kiddie High Chair" listed at F in the gift item/preference column 292. The purchase tracking system of the "POTTERY BARN KIDS ®," which is the store listed on the printout as offering the high chair, informs the registration system that the high chair is on sale for the next week. As indicated at G in FIG. 9, the registration system automatically updates the printout so the next time it prints it reads, "reg. $80, on sale for $60 until May 21." This feature of the registration system is advantageous because it allows a participating store to offer incentives that help move merchandise that has yet to sell.

Gift registry apparatus 20 is programmed as known to those skilled in the art based on the representative screens of FIGS. 10A-G. Particular branch computers 60 (see FIG. 4) use a DOS operating system, are programmed with C++ program language, and make use of dBase database or SQL files for data storage. The central processing computer 66 uses an OS/2 operating system.

With reference to FIGS. 10A-G, as indicated at box 136, the first screen of the program welcomes a user to the "XYZ Gift Registry". The user is given the option of accessing the "registry" or proceeding with "registration". The instruction is given to touch one of the regions indicated.

Most screens include an option for the user to request "help" and will not be further discussed.

If the user touches "registration", then the screen represented by box 138 appears. The registrant user is given the opportunity to select between the options of "new registration", "update previous registration", "release bar code scanner", or "return bar code scanner".

Beginning with box 138, most screens in addition include the option of touching a region entitled "previous screen", which if touched, would result in the previous screen appearing so that the user could then proceed in accordance with the previous screen. Since this option is also available on most screens except the final processing and thank-you screens, it also will not be any further discussed.

If "new registration" is touched, control proceeds to screen 140. Screen 140 provides the registrant user the option of providing information relating to "wedding date", "bride's name", or "groom's name". If the bride's name or the groom's name is selected, control proceeds to the screen represented by box 142. It is understood that box 142 is representative with respect to different screens for the groom and for the bride as appropriate. In any case, the registrant user now has the option to provide information relating to name, address, city, state, zip code, daytime phone and evening phone. When all the information has been provided, there is the additional option of touching the region identified by the word "done". In that way, control can proceed after all information is entered back to box 140. Depending on the item of information to be provided, control proceeds from box 142 to box 144 so that the appropriate information can be entered. The information to be entered is identified in the space marked "variable". As information is entered by depressing either numbers or letters, the appropriate information appears following the colon after the variable information. There may also be space and erase or backspace options. When all the information for the particular variable has been entered, the registrant user touches "done" and control returns to box 142. After the bride's name and the groom's name information has been entered or if the wedding date option is selected, control proceeds as indicated by a bubble "B" to box 146 shown in FIG. 10B. Again, the registrant user is presented with options for providing information, such as, wedding date, location, city, state, shower date number 1, and shower date number 2. Depending on the option selected, control either proceeds to box 148 or to box 144 as indicated by bubble "C". If control proceeds to box 144, then on the touching of "done", control will return to box 146. Assuming control proceeds to box 148, the variable "wedding month" is indicated and the option of the various 12 months is provided. When one of the months is touched, the month will appear following the colon. There

is an option to touch "month not determined". After one of the months or the month not known option is touched, control proceeds to the screen represented by box 150. Alternatively, there is also the option to touch "done" whereupon, control returns to box 146. At the screen represented by box 150, the registrant user is shown the variable "wedding date" and is provided the option of touching dates ranging from one to the total number of days in the particular month of the wedding month previously selected. If a date has not yet been determined, that option is also provided. There is further the option to touch "done" whereupon control returns to box 146. If a date is provided or if the date not determined is touched, control proceeds to the screen represented by box 152. Box 152 displays the variable "wedding year" and the registrant user is given the option of selecting from among various years. After a year has been touched, control returns to box 146 as indicated by bubble "B". Additional information can be provided until all appropriate information is provided for box 146. At that point, the registrant user touches "done" and control will go to a screen (not shown) which thanks the registrant user for providing the information and can give as many instructions as are deemed desirable in order to teach the registrant user what to do next in completing the procedures of FIGS. 5 or 6.

If the registrant at the screen represented by box 138 touches "update previous registration", then control proceeds as shown by bubble "E" to the screen represented by box 172 in FIG. 10E. Screen 172 requests the registrant's number and password and provides appropriate regions in which to touch letters or numbers until the entire registrant number and password is shown following the colon. At that point, the registrant touches "done" and, if the number and password are correct, control proceeds to the screen represented by box 174. If either is incorrect, a screen could appear which tells the user that the number or password is incorrect and that the user will be given another chance to enter them. At that point, screen 172 would reappear. If the incorrect number or password were entered again, control would revert to the welcome screen of box 136.

The screen represented by box 174 provides a series of options which identify items of information requiring correction. The registrant touches one of the items, and control proceeds to an appropriate screen such as might be found in FIGS. 10A or 10B. If the option selected is a "gift listing", then control would proceed to a screen like that of box 176. After all items requiring correction have been corrected, the registrant touches "done" and a screen thanking the registrant could appear before control reverts to the welcome screen of box 136. Additionally,

there could be an intermediate screen which not only thanked the registrant, but explained that a gift certificate was being presented to them for completing the registration task. While the screen was available for viewing, the gift certificate could be printed or otherwise dispensed. Alternatively, a credit could be registered, and the registrant could be given a capability of accessing a gift certificate dispensing routine of the type disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 5,243,174.

At box 176, the registrant is given the option to "delete gift" or "change quantity of gift". Regardless of which option is selected, control proceeds to the screen of box 178 where the appropriate gift number is entered. On completion of entry, "done" is touched. If the option was to delete the gift, control would then revert to box 174. If the option was to change quantity of gift, then control proceeds to the screen represented by box 180. At box 180, a new quantity for the gift is entered. Thereafter, "done" is touched and control reverts to box 174.

As indicated, after all information requiring correction has been corrected, "done" is touched at box 174 and control either immediately reverts to the welcome box 136 or does so after providing a gift certificate as discussed, depending on the option of the system.

If the user who approaches the gift registry apparatus touches "registry" on the first screen as represented by box 136, control proceeds as indicated at bubble "A" to box 154. The potential gift user is given the option to touch "bride's name" or "groom's name". Control then moves to screen 156 or alternatively to screen 158. The screen represented by box 156 provides the option of touching the date of the wedding. In addition, options to scroll to earlier or later dates is also provided. When a date has been touched, control proceeds to box 158 where the bride's or groom's last name is requested and an alphabet is provided so that letters can be touched and the name typed. When the name is completed, the user touches "done" and control proceeds to the screen represented by box 160. Since the last name has been provided in 158, box 160 provides a series of names in the registry which are identical to or similar to the name provided by the user. The user then has the ability to see the first name and perhaps a middle initial. The user can then more positively identify the name of the person who is presumably known to the user. The screen also provides the capability to scroll up or down so that more names can be viewed. After a name has been touched, control proceeds to the screen represented by box 162. Box 162 allows the user to confirm the wedding of interest by touching "yes" or "no". The box shows the name of the bride, the name of the groom, and the date of the wedding. If "no" is touched, control reverts to box 154. If "yes" is touched, control proceeds as indicated

by a bubble "D" to box 164 shown in FIG. 10D. The screen represented by box 164 gives the potential gift giver user the option to select from among various classifications of gifts or all registered gifts or gifts having a certain price maximum or range or some other similar option. The screen also provides the option to scroll up or down to view more options. When a particular option has been touched, control proceeds to the screen represented by box 166. Box 166 shows the gift items desired by the registrant for the particular category selected. The screen preferably includes the number of a particular gift wanted and also the number already purchased. In that way, the potential gift giver can more knowledgeably select an appropriate gift. The screen also provides the ability to scroll up or down. The screen provides the user the option to touch "print registry" or "print page". If the print registry option is selected, all gifts in the registry for the particular registrant are printed. If the option to print the page is selected, then all gifts which can be accessed by scrolling up or down on that particular screen are printed. If the user does not want to print, the option "help" can be touched. A "help" routine is not provided herein, but could easily include the option to terminate use of the registry so that control would revert to the welcome screen represented by box 136. Assuming a print option is selected, control proceeds to a screen represented by box 168. Box 168 simply indicates the amount of time still needed to complete the printing job. Screen 168 requires no action on the part of the user, but rather is informational to the user. After the time has expired so that the printing is completed, control proceeds to the screen represented by box 170. Box 170 thanks the user and instructs her/him to take the printed gift list, use it and return it to a cashier when a purchase is made. Screen 170 remains visible for a predetermined time and then control reverts to the welcome screen represented by box 136.

In a case when a registrant has the capability of taking the bar code scanner from a kiosk housing, the registrant is greeted as indicated by the welcome screen 136. The registrant presses registration and screen 138 appears. If it is a new registration, the new registration portion of screen 138 is pressed and the various screens relating to registering as earlier described appear. Similarly, a registrant can update a previous registration. Of interest at the moment, is the self-service feature which allows the registrant to take the portable bar code scanner. With this in mind, the registrant presses "release bar code scanner". As indicated by the circle "F", the next screen is represented at box 250 in FIG. 10F. Screen 250 prompts the registrant to insert a credit card. It indicates that a debit will be placed against the credit card account as security for the

scanner, but that a credit will be given when the scanner is returned. After that is done, at box 252, a screen is indicated to instruct the registrant to open the door and remove the scanner. At box 254, the registrant is instructed to closed the door and touch a key to acknowledge. At box 256, the monitor can provide whatever instructions are appropriate. The present screen simply indicates to the registrant that she/he/they are now free to scan bar codes of items which they wish to receive as gifts. They are given the further instruction on how to return the scanner and receive credit. As indicated with the circle "A", control then reverts to the welcome screen 136.

When the registrant is ready to return the scanner, the "registration" portion of welcome screen 136 is again touched. At screen 138, "return bar code scanner" is touched. Control then reverts as indicated at circle "G" to the representative screen shown in FIG. 10G. At box 258, the registrant is instructed to insert a credit card. The further instruction is given to use the same card as was used when the scanner was earlier taken so that the proper account can be credited for the scanner return. At box 260, the registrant is instructed to open the door and replace the scanner. After apparatus 20 senses that the scanner has been properly replaced, the registrant at box 262 is instructed to close the door. When the door is sensed to have been closed, at box 264, the registrant is told that the credit card account has been credited and is thanked for using the gift registry. Control then again reverts to the welcome screen.

It is understood that the various screens presented are representative and that more or less information may be provided. It is further understood that fewer or more options may be made available to the user in accordance with the previously disclosed procedures to provide the full capability contemplated by the system.

The present invention is illustrated schematically in FIG. 13. FIG. 13 is a top plan view of a shopping mall having a gift registry kiosk 200 situated centrally. The gift registry kiosk 200 is of the type previously described with reference to FIGS. 1-12. Accordingly, the same figures and element numbers will be used for the description of the present invention. In the preferred embodiment of the present invention, the specific components used are commercially available and are known to those skilled in the art. Examples of the specific components have been previously identified above. In addition to the description of the specific components previously described, other alternative arrangements of a gift registry kiosk 200 are also contemplated by the present invention. For example, instead of using the UPC code to identify desired gifts, any encoding scheme for entering a value representative of a particular item of merchandise could be

used. In the case of the locking mechanism, it is possible to trigger the locking mechanism by the computer system instead of by a bar code swipe. It is also possible, for example, to accept in addition to credit cards, debit cards or even cash and then issue refund check to cover the deposit amount for checking out the scanner.

Each of the merchants which are participating in the gift registry system are identified by a reference number, as illustrated in FIG. 13. Preferably these merchants would identify themselves with identification signs in the windows of their stores, if they have stores, and also by identification signs on the kiosk 200 itself. Identification signs for each merchant may be placed, for instance, in signage area 301, as illustrated in FIG. 11.

The present invention will be described with particular reference to stores as opposed to merchants. The term store is used for ease of understanding the invention and for making the written text easier to read. It is understood that the present invention is equally applicable to vendors who do not have a "store". For instance, there are often times many merchants who have small booths, stands or kiosks in a shopping mall that are not actually stores, with four walls as people have come to use the term. Additionally, participating merchants may be only available through catalogs, as will be described below. These other merchants are understood to be included when the term store is used.

Bar code scanner 40, as previously described, is portable. This allows the registrant to carry scanner 40 from store to store. As the registrant enters a participating store, scanner 40 identifies which particular store the registrant is in by a unique store identifier code. This may be done by scanning in a bar code that is on the doorway of each participating store or printed on a printout provided to the registrant from the kiosk or from a web site with scanner 40, The store may be selected by manually entering a code number for each store via key board 210 or it may be done remotely. For instance, each scanner may have a small receiver (not shown) inside it. As a registrant enters each participating store they typically walk through a security system. This security system may be set up to transmit an identifying signal each time someone walks through the door. This identifying signal may be received by the receiver in scanner 40 and recorded. By recording a unique store identifier, the gift registry system will know which gifts come from which store.

Once the registrant has scanned in each gift that is desired from the participating stores, scanning device 40 is placed back in transfer device 45 which reads the memory of bar code

scanning mechanism 24 for communication to computer 26. It would also be possible to have a transfer device in each store, such that when a registrant was about to leave a store, they would insert the scanner into transfer device 45 and download the gifts selected from that store. This information would then be remotely transmitted to the computer in kiosk 200. From this point on, the gift registry system operates the same as previously described, with the exception that when the information is printed out for a prospective purchaser, the particular store that each gift is located in will be printed out.

As previously stated with respect to the gift registry apparatus described above, bar code scanner 40 could be located in a registrant's home such that the registrant could register for items from multiple merchants via a catalogue that includes bar codes for the items. The registrant would communicate to the kiosk via remote communication, such as a modem or the InterNet. The term catalog should be understood to be not limited to a physical paper catalog, but also encompasses things such as CD-ROMs, and other data storage devices. In this embodiment, it would be required that there be a unique bar code for each catalog to identify the supplier of the particular item. This identifying code could be on the front cover, the back cover, or somewhere within the catalog.

In an alternative embodiment of the present invention, each particular merchant would assist in updating the information in computer 26 such that the computer keeps an accurate list of desired gifts for each particular registrant. This may be done in a number of ways. In one embodiment, the merchant would be in remote communication with the computer of kiosk 200 via modem 37. As the prospective purchaser buys a gift, the merchant would request the list of gifts generated by the gift registry system from the prospective purchaser (e.g., the list shown in FIG. 9). This list of gifts would have on it a bar code 280 (see FIG. 9) that represents a unique identification code for the particular registrant. The merchant would then scan in the identification code, and then scan in the goods being purchased. The list of goods for this particular registrant would then be updated accordingly in computer 26.

In another embodiment, similar to that just discussed, a merchant would simply ask for the gift list from the prospective purchaser as the merchant is ringing up the sale. The merchant would then manually mark which items and how many items were purchased on the list. At the end of the day, all of the merchants associated with the multi-merchant registry would deposit

them with a system operator or in a slot 302 as seen in FIG. 11. The system operator would then update and/or transmit the lists of desired gifts for the registrants.

In another embodiment, the merchant uses a point of sale system wherein the scanner is coupled to the merchant's own gift registry system and/or coupled to the multi-merchant gift registry system. As the merchant scans the purchased items with the scanner, the scanner communicates the purchase to the individual store database (e.g., the store's own gift registry system) and/or the database for the multi-merchant registry system. In this way, the registry may be updated for the registrant. It should be noted that these are only two examples of how computer 26 may be updated and many other methods of updating computer 26 may be utilized without departing from the spirit or scope of the present invention.

Referring to FIG. 14, another embodiment of a multi-merchant gift registry system is illustrated. Specifically, a multi-purpose kiosk 300 is provided that has at least two distinct functions. For example, kiosk 300 may be an automatic teller machine (ATM) or other financial services tool. In addition, kiosk 300 functions as a gift registry system. Kiosk 300 includes a monitor 330 that may include a touch screen 332 for data entry. An opening 308 is provided and may serve to distribute cash, receipts, or registry printouts. Of course, other openings could be provided as needed. An access opening 302 can be used to receive a financial services card such as an ATM card, debit card, credit card or a gift registry card. Coupled with kiosk 300 are one or more portable, hand held bar code scanners 340. Each scanner may include a keypad 310 and a display screen 312.

In one embodiment, kiosk 300 functions similarly to the previously described embodiments. That is, kiosk 300 includes a CPU that operates both the ATM and the gift registry, the appropriate communications links, and various databases. Combining such systems allows kiosk 300 to offer more functions to the consumer and allows the retailer and/or financial institution to reduce overall equipment cost and required floor space when providing these services.

In use, a registrant will insert a credit card or otherwise authorize payment such as by accessing an account via the ATM. The payment or potential payment serves as a deposit to authorize the release of the handheld scanner 340 from compartment 306. The registrant will need to provide various information, as indicated above, to proceed with the gift registry process. Once so provide, the registrant uses scanner 340 to select gifts, which are then stored in memory.

When scanner 340 is returned (or through the use of wireless communication) the selected items are transferred to kiosk 300 or a printer station (not shown) and processed.

Alternatively, kiosk 300 could be configured to require less interaction with the multi-merchant gift registry. That is, one or more scanners 340 are operatively coupled with kiosk 300 and an appropriate deposit may be required to access scanner 340, but the scanner 340 may be a self contained registry system. That is, scanner 340 may incorporate all of the required hardware, software and functionality of the multi-store gift registry embodiments previously described. Scanner 340 may include its own CPU, memory, databases, and communications systems to serve as an independent registry terminal that can communicate with a central registry database, through wireless or hardwire communication protocols. This configuration requires less modification of the accompanying kiosk's alternative function, such as being an ATM or having various other functions.

Referring to FIGS. 15 and 16, a self contained registry scanner 340 is illustrated. Scanner 340 would preferably be coupleable to a printer 400 or other output device that can optionally be part of or close to kiosk 300. Printer 400 serves to print out a confirmation list for the registrant and/or a gift list for potential purchasers. Current ATMs already include a printing function that could be utilized as printer 400, with or without further modification. Additionally, scanner 340 can communicate with a central registry database 410 via communication medium 412. Communication medium 412 may utilize wireless communications facilitated entirely by equipment within scanner 340 or may be hard wired communication device coupled with or forming part of kiosk 300.

FIG. 16 illustrates hand held portable scanner 340 in greater detail. Scanner 340 includes a CPU 420 and associated software to perform the necessary computing functions. Scanner 340 also includes an appropriate amount of memory 430. Various information may be stored within memory 430. For example, various databases may be created and maintained for various registrant's lists. Information relating to and identifying each of the participating merchants may be retained. For example, the registrant can indicate which merchant items will be selected from so that scanner 340 can compare the scanned bar codes to the correct database of products. Thus, databases are maintained indicating store identification and inventory.

As used throughout, scanner 340 can take on any forms. For example, scanner 340 could be a bar code scanner, a digital camera utilizing photo recognition software, or other types of

registration devices. One such type of registration device would be an RF emitter. Each product would have a unique RF tag that would register with the emitter when scanned.

Scanner 340 includes a communication module 440 that allows for communication with a centralized registry. As previously noted, communication module 440 can be a wireless platform or a hardwired configuration accessible when stored within kiosk 300. Scanner 340 also includes various data input mechanisms 450, such as an optical scanner 452 for scanning bar codes. Additionally, data input mechanisms 450 may include manual inputs 454, such as keypad 310, a touch screen or various other input mechanisms. Through data input mechanism 450, the registrant can select a store to scan items in, view and modify a list of selections made, select quantities of scanned products, enter products without scanning, and performing queries such as for availability and pricing. To select the proper store the registrant may type in the name of the store or an appropriate code identifying the store, select it from a list of stores on the display, or scan a bar code identifying the store. The bar code scanned may be physically displayed near an entrance to the store or any other convenient place. Alternatively, the registrant may be provided with a printout of barcodes identifying the various accessible stores. The registrant then need only scan the bar code on the printout to select the store. Various other store selection protocols could also be employed. For example, scanner 340 could detect a signal emitted from a transmitter within the store, uniquely identifying that store and causing scanner 340 to automatically select that store's database. The transmitter could be a dedicated device devoted to the gift registry system or it could be incorporated with an existing system such as a security device.

An identification sensor 455 may optionally be provided. Identification sensor 455 may receive a signal from a transmitter located near or within a given store or merchant location. The signal can toggle scanner 340 to automatically select the appropriate store, in order to choose the proper database of bar codes. Alternatively, the signal may cause scanner 340 to emit an audible or visual signal, such as a beep or flashing light to remind the registrant to select the proper store.

FIG. 17 illustrates the process a registrant may go through in utilizing the multi-merchant gift registry. Initially, the registrant needs to register 500 on the system. This simply requires the registrant to provide information to the system and there are many ways to accomplish this. For example, the registrant can telephone a CSR (customer sales representative) 502 who will receive and enter the appropriate information or an IVR (interactive voice response) system can

be used to receive the same information. Alternatively, the registrant can access the registry through an electronic communication network 504, such as the Internet, to electronically provide information. This can occur by accessing a particular site and responding to various posed questions which can be tailored depending upon the responses received. The applicant can enter information 508 at the kiosk 300 either directly or through the scanner 340. The registrant could fax or email 506 the appropriate information as well. Thus, in one embodiment, a registrant could enter a merchant's store and fill out a paper application for the registry. The information could then be sent in and entered. The information could be sent by electronic medium, such as by fax, email or telephone of the information could be mailed or otherwise physically delivered. Thus, the merchant enjoys the benefits of providing access to the registry without having to have the equipment located within the store. The faxed or scanned document can then be manually entered into the system or automatically processed.

Whatever method is employed, the registrant will typically provide certain basic information 510 such as: name, address, an event identifier, date, certain financial information such as credit card information, and a gift delivery address. Various other information can also be requested. Once received, selected information may be stored within a central database 512 that may be accessible by the various participating merchants 514. Optionally, merchants 514 can update information and otherwise maintain 516 their portion of database 512.

At some point in time after registering 500, the registrant will enter gift information 518 into the system. The selected gifts may be from one or more stores participating the multi-store gift registry. One convenient way to enter this information is to use the hand held scanner 340 to scan merchandise within a store or other location. To obtain scanner 340, the registrant goes to a convenient kiosk 300 and requests a scanner. Because of the value of the scanner, it may be prudent to require the registrant to leave a deposit 520. Since, in some embodiments, kiosk 300 also functions as an ATM, there are various ways to leave the deposit. A credit or debit card may be provided and the information may simply be retained or an appropriate amount is actually charged against the card. Additionally, money may be transferred from any account, such as a checking or savings account, that is accessible from the ATM. Alternatively, a local attendant may be provided to accept other forms of payment and manually gain access to the scanner. After receiving a deposit (if required), access opening 302 opens revealing one or more scanners 340 within compartment 304. Scanner 340 is unlocked and the registrant is able to

remove 522 the scanner. Of course, various other mechanisms may be employed for securing scanner 340 to or within kiosk 300.

The registrant then proceeds to select a store to begin the registry. For example, the multi-merchant registry may be located within a mall and many or all of the mall tenants may participate. The registrant will simply determine where to begin and then go to that merchant's location. Whenever multiple merchants are participating and each merchant has a different database corresponding to the bar codes of their merchandise, the particular merchant location selected must be entered 524 into scanner 340. Selecting the merchant can occur in any number of ways. For example, the registrant may simply scan a bar code physically located near or within the store or merchant location. Alternatively, a list of all participating merchants and identifying bar codes may be provided so that the registrant can scan the identifying bar code off the sheet. The registrant could select the merchant from a list displayed on the scanner or could simply type in a name of the store or merchant. Should the registrant forget to select a merchant or move to another store without indicating this, scanner 340 can be configured to periodically query the registrant as to the store or product identification. As mentioned above, various automatic systems could be employed to electronically transmit a unique store code to scanner 340 as the registrant enters the store.

Once the store has been selected, the registrant scans 526 various items within the store that she would like to add to her registry. If an item does not have an associated bar code, the registrant can look that item up from a list displayed on scanner 340 and select it, or simply type the item in to select it. An associated quantity is also selected. Should the registrant make an error, the keypad 310 and display screen 312 can be used to modify the list of selected items 528.

As each item is scanned, it is associated with a product and stored 530 within memory 430 of scanner 340. Associating a bar code with a product requires having access to a database of that merchant's products and bar codes. With a self-contained scanner 340 that database might be stored locally in memory 430 or contained within a central database and transmitted to the scanner when needed. Alternatively, the scanned data is stored in a raw format and correlated at a later point. Either upon the completion of the registry or after each item is scanned, data is transmitted to database 512 where the registry is maintained.

In one embodiment, the registrant scans the various items within the store and the data is wirelessly transmitted to a remote terminal (e.g. the common database of the main registry

computer for the multi-merchant gift registry system). In one embodiment, the data is wirelessly transmitted to the store's local database, which is part of its point of sale system or its own gift registry system. In one embodiment, the local database will be in communication with the multi-merchant gift registry system. Whether the database being utilized is the one at the remote terminal or the one in the store, the scanned information is correlated with a product identification, which is then transmitted back to the scanner where it is displayed. The registrant then chooses the product and enters a quantity. This information is again wirelessly transmitted to the same database and the registry is updated.

The registrant may move from merchant to merchant selecting as many products as desired. When finished, scanner 340 is returned to kiosk 300 and the deposit is voided, returned or a reimbursement is issued. Stored within database 512 is a complete list for the registrant including each product selected and the merchant it was selected from.

The registrant could select products in a variety of other ways 532. For example, a catalog may be provided either in a paper format or on-line in an electronic format. Once again, various merchants can be identified (or may have store specific catalogs) and items selected. When on-line, the items can simply be selected with the registrant's computer. With a paper catalog, a scanner may be provided to scan bar codes and either the data is transmitted or the scanner is brought to a kiosk 300. Alternatively, a list or a description of items as well as a desired merchant (that is, a given merchant need not participate with the multi-merchant registry and a registrant can still have items from that merchant added to their registry) may be selected either by scanning, otherwise electronically providing, or manually providing the description of the product of service. This information can be phoned, faxed, emailed or otherwise transferred to the system. Finally, items may be placed on the registry by telephone either through a CSR or IVR system. The items chosen are selected and sent 534 to database 512.

Referring to FIG. 18, after gifts are registered for, the registrant invites 540 guests and makes them aware of the registry 542. This can happen in a traditional manner. For example, the registrant may invite guests to a wedding by sending them a formal invitation. The registrant may simply provide information about the registry by word of mouth or may include a written description of the registry. Alternatively, the system of the present invention can generate cards 544 for the registrant that are given to the guests. Each card may identify the registrant and a location of the registry, i.e., the Downtown Mall. The card may have encoded information

identifying the registrant. The encoded information may be in the form of a bar code. Finally, the card 544 may be fabricated to serve as an invitation to a guest. That is, card 544 may be a document that may come in any shape, size or configuration and may include any desired printed matter, including the encoded information.

In one embodiment, the system provides a gift card 650 as illustrated in FIGS. 31 and 32. FIG. 31 depicts the front of the card 650 and FIG. 32 depicts the back of the card. One or more of these gift cards may be provided to the registrant. The registrant may distribute some of these cards to others that he/she wants to access the gift registry. In one embodiment, as shown in FIG. 31, the front of the card 650 has an introduction section 652, which comprises a mall name section 654, a location information section 656, and a gift registry service section 658. In one embodiment, the introduction section 652 states the name of the registrant 660. In another embodiment, the introduction section 652 does not state the name of the registrant 660.

The mall name section 654 states the name of the participating shopping mall or merchant. The location information section 656 provides the address of the participating shopping mall or merchant. The gift registry service section 658 states the name of the gift registry service providing the card 650.

As shown in FIG. 32, in one embodiment, the back of the card 650 has a magnetic strip 662 and/or a bar code 664, a registry identification number section 666, an email address section 668, and a telephone number section 670. In one embodiment, as indicated in FIGS. 31 and 32, the card 650 also has an imbedded memory chip 672.

The registry identification number section 666 indicates the number associated with the registrant in the gift registry system and allows a gift buyer to read the number 666 and manually enter it into the gift registry system to receive a printout of the gifts selected by the registrant. The email address section 668 indicates the email address for the gift registry system and allows a gift buyer to locate the website for the gift registry system. The telephone number section 670 indicates the telephone number for the gift registry system.

In one embodiment, the magnetic strip 662 and/or the bar code 664, and the imbedded chip 672 each carry the registry identification number (i.e., the number associated with the registrant in the gift registry system) in machine readable form. This allows the gift buyer to insert the card 650 into a reader at the gift registry kiosk to obtain a listing of the gifts for which

the registrant has registered. In one embodiment, the magnetic strip 662 and the imbedded chip 672 also contain information regarding the gifts selected by the registrant.

In one embodiment, the magnetic strip 662 and/or the imbedded chip 672 are used to associate a stored value with the card 650 and/or registrant. The stored value can be used to purchase items at a participating store. By providing the gift registry system with a monetary source (e.g., inserting a credit card into the gift registry system kiosk), a stored value can be associated with the gift card 650. In other words, the gift card 650 will have a credited amount associated with it that can be used to make purchases of items listed in the registrant's gift list.

In one embodiment, the stored value is electronically stored on the card's magnetic strip 662 and/or imbedded chip 672. In another embodiment, the stored value is electronically stored in an account database separate from the card (e.g., a bank account database or an account database set up with a merchant) and the card's magnetic strip 662 and/or imbedded chip 672 is used to associate the card 650 with the account database. For example, the card 650 is inserted into the kiosk and the kiosk reads the card's identification number from the card's magnetic strip 662. The kiosk communicates with the account database associated with the card and verifies the amount of monies deposited in the account. Purchases can then be made and the merchant will be credited the purchase price and the account will be reduced by the purchase price.

When utilizing the registry, the guest identifies 548 the appropriate registrant. This can be done by typing in the registrant's name or selecting it from a list. Alternatively, the card 650 may simply be scanned thereby causing the registrant to be identified to the system. Once so identified, a list of desired gifts is provided 550 in either an paper or electronic format. The guest may then choose a particular gift from a particular store and purchase it 552. The guest may make the purchase in person at the store, on-line through an electronic catalog (where the encoded information can again be used to identify the registrant), or via telephone through a CSR or IVR system. Once an item is purchased, the registrant's list is updated to reflect that purchase.

Often, a gift buyer will find it difficult to select the appropriate gift for a person. For example, a gift-buying spouse may have difficulty finding a gift that will please a gift-receiving spouse on their anniversary. In one embodiment of the invention, the registrant gift-receiving spouse compiles a gift wish list by shopping for acceptable gifts and recording the acceptable gifts with the gift registry system. The gift registration system provides the gift-receiving spouse

with a gift card 650 as illustrated in FIGS. 31 and 32. In one embodiment, the gift card 650 has the registry identification number associated with the gift-receiving spouse. In one embodiment, the gift card 650 will also electronically carry the gift wish list.

The gift-receiving spouse gives the gift card 650 to the gift-buying spouse. The gift-buying spouse takes the gift card 650 to the gift registry kiosk or, in one embodiment, to an ATM adapted to interface with the gift registry system. The gift-buying spouse enters the registry identification number into the registry system by manually entering the number printed on the card 650 or inserting the card 650 into the card reader at the kiosk or ATM. The kiosk or ATM then provides the gift wish list to the gift-buying spouse by displaying the list on a screen or printing the list. The gift-buying spouse may then purchase one or more items listed on the gift wish list knowing that the gift-receiving spouse will be happy about the gift that is received.

The gift card 650 facilitates an ongoing relationship between an individual and the gift registry service and, indirectly, between the individual and the merchants affiliated with the gift registry service. For example, the individual carries the gift card 650 in his wallet with his identification, credit cards, etc. The individual typically receives gifts on various occasions throughout the year and over the course of his life (e.g., birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, accomplishments, Christmas, etc.). Thus, as he makes various shopping trips over the course of time, he keeps his eyes open for potential gifts he would like to receive. When the individual happens to encounter an item that he would like to receive as a gift, he takes the gift card 650 to the registration system kiosk, where he enters his registration identification number into the registration system by manually typing the number on the kiosk keyboard or inserting the card 650 into the kiosk card reader. The gift registration system then inquires as to whether he would like a printout of his gift wish list or whether he would like to update his gift wish list. He then selects the option allowing updating of the gift wish list.

When updating his gift wish list, he may, as previously described, manually enter the appropriate codes for the store and desired gift item. Alternatively, when updating his gift wish list, he may, as previously described, take the machine-readable tri-fold form or handheld scanner to the appropriate store to record the appropriate codes for the store and desired gift item. The gift and store codes are then entered from the scanner or tri-fold form into the gift registration system, thereby updating the gift wish list.

When a gift-receiving occasion arises for the individual, he provides the gift card 650 to a prospective gift-buyer, who then uses the card 650 to obtain a listing of the gift wish list from the kiosk or an ATM. The gift-buyer may then utilize the gift wish list to guide his purchasing.

As previously mentioned, in one embodiment of the gift card 650, the magnetic strip 662 and/or the imbedded chip 672 also contain a stored value that can be used to purchase items at the participating store. This aspect of the gift card 650 is advantageous. For example, young children often desire to give presents to their parents on the parent's birthday, on mother's or father's day, on Christmas, etc. However, young children typically lack the monetary means to purchase a gift for their parent's gift-receiving occasion.

In one embodiment of the invention, the parent gives the gift card 650 and a printout of the gift list to the child. The child takes the card 650 and the list to the a participating store and selects a listed gift item. The child purchases the a listed gift item by presenting the card 650 to a cashier who swipes the card through a reader. The stored value associated with the card 650 is decreased by the dollar amount of the purchase, while the store is credited with the dollar amount of the purchase. This system allows the child to have the satisfaction of providing his parent with a desired gift while allowing the parent to be surprised by the gift.

In one embodiment, the registrant may allocate all or a portion of the stored value to one or more specific gift items listed in the gift wish list. Thus, the child may only utilize the card 650 to purchase those gifts for which the stored value is allocated.

Because of the stored value feature and the ability of the stored value to be allocated to specific gift items listed in the gift wish list, a registrant may also use their gift card 650 to purchase gifts for other people. For example, a mother, who is the registrant and owner of the gift card 650, may go shopping for school clothing for her teenager. The mother selects a number of clothing items that serve as candidates from which the teenager may select. The candidate clothing items are entered into the gift wish list as previously described. The mother allocates an appropriate portion of the stored value to each selected clothing item and gives the gift card 650 to the teenager.

The teenager goes to the kiosk or ATM to obtain a listing of the candidate clothing and takes the listing and card 650 to the participating stores. The teenager then selects from the candidate clothing those items with the sizes, colors and styles with which the teenager is most pleased. After making the selections, the teenager presents the card 650 to the cashier who

swipes the card through the reader. The stored value associated with the card 650 is decreased by the dollar amount of the purchase, while the store is credited with the dollar amount of the purchase.

This system is advantageous because it allows a teenager to have some freedom in the selection of school clothing and the expenditure of money allocated to school clothing. Also, this system is advantageous because the teenager's selection of clothing occurs within style and monetary parameters established by the parent, without the parent having to be present while the teenager determines fit or preferences.

In one embodiment, the gift card 650 can operate as an electronic gift certificate. For example, a gift-buying registrant selects prospective gift items for a gift-receiving person. The registrant has the prospective gift items added to the gift list associated with the gift card 650. The registrant has an appropriate amount of the stored value associated with each gift item listed. The registrant provides the gift card 650 to the gift-receiving person who takes the gift card 650 to a kiosk or ATM to obtain a printout of the prospective gift items from which the gift-receiving person may chose. The gift-receiving person then selects a gift from the list of the prospective gift items and provides the gift card 650 to the casher who swipes the card 650 through a card reader. The stored value associated with the card 650 is decreased by the dollar amount of the purchase, while the store is credited with the dollar amount of the purchase. Thus, the gift card can serve as an electronic gift certificate.

Where a registrant desires to increase the stored value of the gift card 650, the registrant, in one embodiment, enters a participating store and presents the gift card 650 to the clerk operating the checkout register. The registrant communicates the desired amount of increase (e.g., $200.00) to the clerk and pays the communicated dollar amount (e.g., via cash, credit or check). In one embodiment, the gift card 650 is then run through a device (i.e., a magnetic strip or imbedded chip writing device) that increases the stored value of the gift card 650 by downloading the new stored value onto the magnetic strip 662 or imbedded chip 672 of the card 650. In another embodiment, the stored value of the card 650 is updated in the registration system to reflect the new stored value. In one embodiment, both the card 650 and the registration system are updated.

FIG. 33 depicts a gift card/certificate selection form that may be used in updating the stored value of a gift card 650 or in issuing a gift certificate. As shown in FIG. 33, the gift

card/certificate selection form has one or more monetary amount columns 680 and a corresponding number of code columns 682, which may be in a human readable form and/or a machine readable form (e.g., bar code). When updating a stored value on a gift card 650 or issuing a gift certificate, the clerk scans the bar code 680 associated with the dollar amount 682 communicated to the clerk. The system then processes the value and the value of the gift card 650 is updated as described above or a gift certificate of corresponding value is issued.

As shown in FIG. 33, in one embodiment, the gift card/certificate selection form displays a store name 684, a printed identification code 686, and a machine-readable identification code 688 (e.g., bar code), both of which are associated with the store name 684. The identification codes 686, 688 can be used to identify to the registration system where the gift card 650 was updated or where a gift certificate was issued.

One strength of the multi-store gift registry system is the ability to allow a registrant to register for gifts at any number of stores or merchants that may be physically close together or remote from one another. For example, multiple stores within a mall can utilize the system, a chain of store may use the system throughout their various stores, or a number of completely unrelated stores that are physically separated may utilize the system. Thus, the registrant can conveniently register for whatever they want and provide easy access to the entire registry to their guests. However, for various reasons some stores may maintain their own registry system and do not participate in the multi-store gift registry system. For example, a given store may be very large and already has an extensive registry system.

FIG. 19 illustrates how the multi-store gift registry system can further act as a universal registry 570 allowing users the convenience of utilizing both the multi-store registry and the individualized registries of other stores. By way of example, assume registrant 572 has registered for a number of gifts at one or more stores through the multi-store gift registry described above. That registry is maintained and updated on database 574. Further assume that Merchant 1 588 and Merchant 2 590 each maintain their own individual gift registries and that registrant 572 has registered for gifts on both.

Universal registry 570 provides access to registrant 572 to view her registry and make changes. For example, registrant 572 may access a Web site for universal registry 570, enter a unique identifier, and have the registry presented electronically. Registrant 572 may then select an aggregation function provided. Once selected, universal registry queries registrant 572 as to

any other registries that have been utilized and what the registrant's identification and password information is for each of those registries. Universal registry 570 then accesses the designated registries 576, 578 and provides the registrant's ID and password. The registries 576, 578 access their respective databases 580, 582 and provide the registry information to universal registry 570. Universal registry 570 then updates its own registry information to include the items from the other registries. When a guest 586 later accesses universal registry 570, they are provided with a complete registry, including items selected from stores not necessarily participating in the multi-merchant gift registry.

Guest 586 can simply view the complete registry and then go to any individual merchant and purchase the product. As this occurs, merchants 588, 590 update their registries and databases 580, 582. Universal registry 570 periodically accesses these registries 576, 578 and updates the universal registry to reflect any purchases made or other changes. Universal registry 570 can also provide a purchase system 584 by which guest 586 can purchase items off the registry. Purchase system can function like any on-line retailer, taking order and payment information and arranging delivery. However, as universal registry 570 may be established to provide registry information and not necessarily to engage in retail transactions, an alternative purchase system 584 may be provided. Purchase system 584 can take a request to purchase a registry item from guest 586 along with any level of contact and payment information. This information can then be passed to the appropriate merchant 588, 590 as a "hot lead." The merchant can either initiate a commercial transaction with guest 586 if sufficient information and authorization was provided or may simply contact guest 586 to offer the product.

In any event, merchants 588, 590 benefit from the increased traffic to the on-line site and/or their brick-and-mortar presence and they retain the ability to sell the registered products. That is, universal registry, in this embodiment, does not just identify the products registered for and try to find alternative sources for the guest to purchase the product. Of course, universal registry could offer such a service, but it would likely discourage merchants 588, 590 from fully cooperating. Another benefit provided by both the multi-merchant registry and/or the universal registry 570 is the ability of the registrant to present their entire registry and all the stored registered at to each guest. Traditionally, there may have be some tendency on the part of the registrant to "pre-screen" their own guests. That is, registrant's would not inform certain guests that they were registered at certain stores that the registrant deemed to be "beneath" the guest or

alternatively, they would not inform their guests that they were registered at stores considered by the registrant to be to extravagant or too expensive. Now, all the information can be provided to all the guests without fear of being presumptuous. The use of a card having registrant specific information also furthers this dissemination and facilitates the use of the universal registry. That is, the card can indicate where to go to physically take advantage of the multi-merchant registry retailers and can also indicate various Web sites or other electronic forums that utilize the universal registry.

By pairing a multi-merchant registry with another utilitarian device, such as an ATM, opportunities for cross-sale marketing can be realized. Referring to FIG. 20, a flowchart is illustrated presenting the cross-sale marketing opportunities offered to a financial institution when the multi-merchant gift registry is paired with that institution's ATMs. As discussed above, the registrant initiates 600 the registration process in any number of ways. Through this process, the registrant will identify 602 the type of event that they are registering for on the system. The system can then determine which products the registrant may be interested in. In the case of a pairing with an ATM, those products would typically be financial products offered by the institution. The system will then present a solicitation 604 to the registrant asking them if they would be interested in receiving information about the various targeted products. The registrant may decline 606 the solicitation and the registration continues 610. If the registrant accepts the solicitation 606, the information gathered by the registry is provided to the financial institution which will later contact the registrant to discuss the various financial products.

One common type of registry is a wedding registry. For most couples, a wedding is a major life changing event that will require them to make many decisions and purchases beyond the gift registry. For example, many couples will buy jewelry, a home, or an automobile. These couples may want to consolidate debt or banking accounts, obtain financing or other credit. Thus, these leads can be of tremendous value to the financial institution paired with the gift registry system. Of course, at this particular time the couple is usually very busy and often overwhelmed. Thus, sorting through the plethora of financial options may seem very daunting and undesirable. Thus, the system simplifies the process and provides a direct, low pressure solution. That is, the registrant is presented with information about products and services they will very likely need or want and an easy way of obtaining information from the financial institution.

With any of the embodiments described above, the registrant will formulate a list of gifts and many guests will purchase and provide those gifts 612. However, in many cases registrants will not receive all of the gifts on their list and they may not receive the gifts they most wanted. Thus, the multi-merchant gift registry system maintains an updated registry for the registrant even after the event. Working with the various merchants, targeted mailings 614 or other solicitation can be provided to the registrant after the event for those specific items selected for the registry that were not purchased by guests. Thus, the system provides a unique opportunity for merchants to entice the registrant to purchase products that the merchant knows the registrant wants. Of course, various special offers or pricing could be offered for further entice the registrant. The targeted advertising can take any form, from traditional paper mailings, electronic advertisements, or telephone solicitations.

After the event, the cards sent to guests may continue to be utilized in a way that is beneficial to the guest, the retailer, and the registry system. The cards can have a unique identifier (such as a bar code that is scanned at the time of purchase) that identifies the guest to the system. Special offers, discounts, or promotions may be offered to encourage people to present their cards when making purchases. Thus, malls or other entities can utilize the card to track the purchasing habits of individuals even as they move between unrelated stores. This allows their purchasing habits to be analyzed and allows for targeted advertising to be generated. This can also allow malls or other entities to track the effectiveness of their various promotions.

FIG. 21 illustrates another embodiment of a multi-store gift registry system 700 that can be used within a given location, such as a mall 710 having a number of retailers 712, 714, 716, 718 participating in the system. Of course, mall 710 could also include any number of other retailers that are not participating in the system. A portable handheld scanner 760 (FIG. 23) includes a wireless transceiver 761 and is used in conjunction with registry system 700. That is, in a similar fashion to the previous embodiments, a registrant takes scanner 760 to any of the participating retailers 712, 714, 716, 718 and identifies the particular retailer to system 700. Individual products are then scanned and added to the registrant's gift registry.

Initially, the registrant will acquire scanner 760 from a local registry system 720 located within the given location, such as mall 710. Local registry system 720 can be any location where one or more scanners 760 are stored when not in use. For example, local registry system 720 could be located at a service counter in mall 710, a service counter in a retailer, an office, in a

free-standing kiosk, in a modified ATM kiosk, or at any number of locations wherein scanner 760 are monitored by human agents or automated means.

The registrant takes scanner 760 to an individual retailer, for example retailer 712 and retailer 712 is identified to system 700. This can be accomplished by keying in a name or identification for retailer 712, scanning a code located in or near retailer 712, or receiving a signal indicating retailer 712 via transceiver 761 from a transmitter within retailer 712 (a transmitter could be dedicated to this task or serve another primary purpose, such as a security device). That is, system 700 is toggled in some manner to indicate that the codes that will be scanned should correlate with a product database of retailer 712. The registrant then scans an identifier, such as a bar code, associated with an item within retailer 712. Alternatively, other than scanning similar data could be entered in a variety of different ways. For example, voice recognition or electronic identifier could be utilized, rather than optically scanning data. Data related to a given product simply needs to be entered into the scanner in an appropriate manner. That data is transmitted by transceiver 761 from the scanner to a transceiver 768 (FIG. 24) located within retailer 712 and coupled with a controller 766. Controller 766 is simply a computer or other hardware and software configuration used to process the data received via transceiver 768. The received data is then correlated with a product database and a product identifier is transmitted back to scanner 760. Scanner 760 displays the product identification and queries the registrant as to whether this was the intended product. The registrant responds and assuming it was correct, scanner 760 may query for a quantity. That quantity is entered and the quantity and product information is again sent from scanner 760 to transceiver 768 and ultimately added to the registrant's gift registry.

Referring to FIGS. 21 and 24 there are several ways that this embodiment can operate. Scanned data initially received from scanner 760 can be compared by controller 766 to an independent product database 770 maintained with controller 766. Alternatively, controller 766 can be coupled with retailer's 712 retail communication system 772 and thus access retailer's 712 own product database 774. Alternatively, controller 766 can communicate with local registry system 720, wherein a product database can be separately maintained either at local registry system 720 or at central system 722. Central system 722 can be a centralized registry system maintained to receive and process information from one or more registry systems 700. For example, a number of malls, each having a local registry system 720 could communicate

with one central system 722 that can be accessed by various registrant's or gift givers, directly or through an appropriate communication medium such as the internet or a telephone voice response system. Once controller 766 has access to retail communication system 720, controller 766 can communicate with local registry system 720 and/or central system 722. Thus, it would be possible to eliminate any communication with local registry system 720. Alternatively, local registry system 720 can serve as and perform the functions of central system 722 if so desired.

Controller 766 receives information from scanner 760 and accesses an appropriate database. If that database is maintained within local registry system 720 or central system 722, then controller 768 relies on retailer communication 772 for access. That is, controller 766 utilizes retailer communication 772 to communicate with local registry system 720 and/or central system 722. Retailer communication 772 can include access to a LAN 724 (local area network) maintained within mall 710 that couples retailer 712 with local registry system 720. Alternatively, retailer communication 772 could include internet access 726 and local registry system 720 or central system 722 could also be provided with internet access 728. Of course, any other communication medium such as telephone lines, satellite communication or various other communication platforms could be utilized.

Thus, controller 766 acts to receive data from scanner 760 and correlate that data with a product identification. Then, the product identification data is sent back to scanner 760. The registrant may elect to select the identified product and this data is passed back to controller 766. Controller 766 then updates the gift registry maintained either at local registry system 720 or central system 722. Controller 766 can update the registry each time an item is received, or the data can be stored temporarily in controller database 770 and then update the registry only when then registrant indicates that they have completed registering at retailer 712.

To summarize the embodiment of FIG. 21, scanner 760 is in wireless communication with controller 766 and when necessary controller 766 communicates with local registry system 720, central system 722 (directly or via local registry system 720), and/or retail database 774 through retail communication 772. Thus, each retailer will have a controller 766 and one or more transceivers 768 sufficient to cover the physical confines maintained by that retailer. For retailer 712 the area covered by transceiver 768 may include coverage area 732. Likewise retailers 714, 716, and 718 may have coverage areas 734, 736, and 738 respectively.

FIG. 22 illustrates another embodiment, wherein scanner 760 can communicate with local registry system 720 via wireless communication. That is, local registry system 720 includes an appropriate controller and transceiver 750 to perform the same functions noted above. However, by using appropriately positioned repeaters 740, 742 scanner 760 can communicate directly with local registry system 720. Local registry system 720 can then obtain any information it needs from it's own database that includes the various product of the retailer's participating in system 700. Alternatively, local registry system 720 can communicate with central system 722 via communication link 730. Communication link 730 can be a telephone line, an internet connection, a dedicated line or any other appropriate communication medium. Thus, the appropriate databases can be maintained at central system 722. As still yet another alternative, local registry system 720 can communicate with the participating retailer via LAN 724 or internet connection 725 to query a given retailer's database directly.

Repeaters 740, 742 are positioned such that wherever scanner 760 is utilized within a given participating retailer, signals may be communicated between local registry system 720 and scanner 760. In the illustrated embodiment, each retailer 712, 714, 716, and 718 will have one or more repeaters (not shown) to define coverage areas 732, 734, 736 and 738. Repeaters 740, 742 have included coverage areas 744, 746 that overlap the retailer's coverage areas. A combination of the embodiment of FIG. 21 and that of FIG. 22 can also be achieved. That is, each retailer may continue to have a transceiver and controller. Thus, scanner 760 may communicate with a given controller for some purposes and local registry system for other purposes. The particular combination achieved can vary depending upon how the system is ultimately implemented. For example, scanner 760 can send scanned data to controller 766 and controller 766 can send the correlating product information that is obtained, for example from retail databases 774, back to scanner 760. Then scanner 760 can send an indication to add the product (with or without additional quantity information) directly to local registry system 720, which then updates the registry either locally or at central system 722.

In either of the previous two embodiments or a combination thereof, scanner 760 is essentially a "dumb" device. That is, scanner 760 scans and sends information out and any matching of the scanned data with product information is performed by another component. The information received by the scanner may be displayed and additional information may be requested and input, but no processing occurs within the scanner. However, in another

embodiment illustrated in FIG. 23, scanner 760 includes a removable memory device such as memory card 762. Scanner 760 still sends scanned data via transceiver 761 to either controller 766 or local registry system 720 and receives a product identification in return. That correlated information relating to a product identification and optionally quantity selected are stored on the memory card 762. When the registrant has completed the selection process, memory card 762 can be removed and brought to memory reader 764, where the data is taken off and sent to the appropriate location to be added to the gift registry. Memory reader 764 can be located in a retail location or with local registry system 720. In any event, the data is passed from memory reader 762 to either controller 766, local registry system 720 or central registry system 722 depending upon where memory reader 762 is located. The data can then be processed in bulk rather than adding each item separately to the gift registry.

FIG. 25 is a flowchart illustrating a process for utilizing scanner 760 in a wireless setting. A registrant obtains a scanner from a retailer or from local registry system 720 located in a mall 710 or other similar location. The registrant proceeds to a given retailer and identifies the retailer to system 700 in any of the ways previously identified.

In use, the registrant identifies an item they wish to add to their gift registry. The registrant scans (800) a bar code or other identifier associated with the product by using scanner 760. Scanner 760 then transmits (802) the scanned data and the transmitted data is received (804) by a transceiver located elsewhere. The receiving transceiver passes (806) the data to a first computer that searches (808) a database to correlate (810) the scanned data with a product identification. The first computer could be a retailer's own system, controller 766, local registry system 720, or central system 722. That is, the first computer could be any configuration of hardware and/or software capable of accessing and processing the required information. Likewise, the database could be the retailer's product database or an independent database of the retailer's products maintained in conjunction with controller 766, local registry system 720, or central system 722.

In the most simple application, the correlated data could be added (826) directly to a gift registry. That is, the product is scanned and one product is identified and added to the registry without further confirmation or requests for a quantity.

Alternatively, after the data has been correlated (810) with a product identification, that product identification is passed back to the transceiver (812) from which it is then sent (814) to

scanner 760. The product identification is then displayed (816) on scanner 760. This allows the registrant to confirm that the correct product was scanned and would also avoid any issue relating to having improperly selected the retailer's identity. That is, if the wrong retailer is selected, the scanned products will not be matched with the proper data base and the registrant can recognize the problem via the displayed information.

Once the product information is displayed (816), a query is presented (818). The query could simply be to confirm whether this is the correct product or the query could further include a requested quantity. The system could also be configured such that quantity information could always be selectively entered but if it is not, a default of one is presumed. The registrant responds (820) to the query by inputting the requested information and scanner 760 then transmits this information to a transceiver (822). This could be the same transceiver utilized to receive the scanned information or a different transceiver. For example, the initial scanned data could be received (804) by a transceiver coupled with the retailer's database wherein the transceiver utilized to received the registrant's input could be coupled directly to the local registry system. As explained above, there are multiple configurations available to accomplish the task.

In any event, the received information is passed to a second computer (824). The second computer is any hardware, software or combination thereof that can receive and process the data appropriately. The first computer and the second computer can be the same device or they can be different devices. As in the previous example, the first computer could be equipment associated with the retailer's own database to process a request for product identification. The second computer in this example, could be coupled with the local registry system and/or central system 722. Again, multiple configurations are possible. The second computer acts to update (826) the gift registry, which can be maintained at local registry system 720 or by central system 722.

FIG. 26 illustrate a process for using scanner 760 when scanner 760 includes a removable memory card 762. The process is very similar to that illustrated in FIG. 25 and only the differences will be discussed further. After the product identification data has been presented (816) and a query has been presented (818) to the registrant, the registrant inputs (820) an appropriate response. If the registrant response is to add the product (and/or a specific quantity), this information is stored (828) on a removable memory card. After the registrant has completed

all of his selections, the memory card is removed and brought to the second computer (830), where the card is read the information is used to update (832) the gift registry.

As may be appreciated, there are a number of components that can be utilized in various combinations to achieve the appropriate communications. FIG. 27 presents a chart illustrating some of the possible parameters for communicating scanned data from scanner 760 to the first computer that acts to correlate the scanned data to a product. In this chart, the transceiver on the left side is always that of scanner 760. The right most component for any variation is the first computer. Each arrow represents a possible communication protocol and it should be noted that where other than wireless options are presented, any communication medium beyond those listed could be utilized.

For example, in the first variation the transceiver of scanner 760 communicates via a wireless link to local registry system 720 and local registry system 720 acts as the first computer to correlate the scanned data with product information. While not shown on the chart, the database used could be associated with a given retailer or associated with the local registry system itself. In the fourth variation from the top, the transceiver of scanner 760 transmits data that is repeated by a repeater and sent to local registry system 720 and is then passed to central registry system 722, wherein central registry system 722 acts as the first computer in the above described flowcharts.

FIG. 28 is similar to FIG 27 and shows the various configurations for sending data from scanner 760, always illustrated as the transceiver on the left, to the second computer referred to in the above flowcharts and illustrated as the right most component. Similarly, FIG 29 illustrates some of the arrangements possible when using a removable memory device illustrated as the left most component and the second computer as the right most components. FIGS. 27, 28, and 29 are not meant to be exhaustive or all inclusive, but are rather meant to illustrate many of the potential arrangements of the components.

It is understood that equivalents are possible within the spirit of the present invention and that changes made from the present disclosure, to the full extent extended by the general meaning of the terms in which the appended claims are expressed, are understood to be within the principle of the invention.